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647 In February, 1924, were heard the first rumblings of the
622 storm. The reports of the civil officials and the petitions of the oppressed at last moved the Urumchi Government to action. Orders came from Urumchi, nominally emanating from Peking but really issued on the Governor's sole responsibility, dismissing the Titai and abolishing his post. The General refused to give up the seals of his office and defied the Governor's authority. At the same time, partly for
● 702 purposes of bluff and partly in order to cut the ground from under the feet of those who accused him of maintaining a paper army, he hastily enrolled some hundreds of recruits and gave large orders in the bazaars for new uniforms and boots. Something had also to be done about the forced sale of wax, the most unpopular of all his impositions. The Titai's pro-
622 cedure was characteristic. He arrested eight of his own wax-
821 distributing agents, charged them with collecting money from the people without his knowledge, and ordered their fingers and toes to be cut off joint by joint in the specially-constructed hay-chopping machine mentioned in a former chapter. Four of the men escaped or bought themselves off, the others were duly mutilated and exposed at the four gates of the city, their several limbs nailed to the wall behind them. One of the poor wretches had already died when I heard about this atrocity, but I had one of the others brought in by my orderlies and cared for by our Indian doctor; the Swedish missionaries did the same for the remaining two, and all three eventually recovered. It may be mentioned that one of them was a faithful servant of the Titai's who, when the latter's great wooden palace at Pakalik caught fire three years before, rushed into the room in which his master lay in a drunken sleep and carried him out of the burning building.

647 But the cup of the Titai's iniquities was full. It will be
669 remembered that on the road to Keriya I had heard of an ominous concentration of troops at Aqsu, 300 miles north-east of Kashgar. Information I received at Karghalik and Yarkand on the return journey showed that a considerable force had been collected and was shortly to march on Kashgar under the command of Erh Taoyin of Aqsu, and that Ma Titai was the objective. On the morning of Sunday 1st June, I had an early morning appointment some miles from the town, and was on my way back at half-past ten, when I was met by an orderly with a message from the Mir Munshi to the effect that there had been fighting at the New

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no further trouble in the inn from inquisitive onlookers. We hung a curtain at our door and no one ventured to lift it.

The aspect of Hsinghsinghsia was very remarkable. It is a narrow ravine between massive rocks. All these were of sombre colour and forbidding outline, some being veined with long streaks of white granite, which traversed them just as forked-lightning appears to rend an ink-black sky. The lower portion of the rocks was worn by the waters of some ancient river, and an old tablet records that 'In this place baboons were wont to come to drink,' hence the name 'The Ravine of Baboons.' The only object of historical interest was the grave of a Mahommedan saint, whose tomb was cut in the solid rock. It was sealed, but hearing that we wished to see it, a sergeant broke the seals and allowed us to enter. The sepulchre dated from the Han dynasty, in the early days of the Christian era, and is believed by the faithful to hold an empty tomb, the holy man, whose name was Kai, having come to life again and passed elsewhere. In the Chinese temple the Taoist priest showed us with pride a fine specimen of quartz, which he had procured from a neighbouring hill. The name of Hsinghsinghsia, by the alteration of a character without changing the sound, may also be read 'The Starry Pass,' and the two names are used interchangeably. This quartz he called the 'Star Stone' and the hill from which it is taken 'Starry Mountain.' It glitters in the moonlight like a thousand twinkling stars.

As the evangelistic services continued we became very friendly with the men, from whom we heard many tragic stories. One boy of sixteen had been on his way from his home in Yungchang, Kansu, to an uncle, who had a business in Hami. 'My mother is a widow and I

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am her only child,' he told us. 'She has no idea what has happened to me, and thinks that I am safe with my uncle in Hami. They stopped me here, and say that I am to be a soldier. They allow us neither to write nor to receive letters. I was born to an unlucky fate.'

An elderly man employed in the Yamen had left his wife in Urumchi in order to transact business in Kansu, but he was not allowed to get there, and had been doing office work for the garrison for over a year. He was attempting to forget his troubles by opium-smoking.

A youth, whose legs were a terrible sight from flogging, came smiling to our room and addressed us by name: 'Do you know me?' he said. 'I am a Suchow boy and attended your Children's Service every night last winter. I would not believe the people who told me I should not get through to "Kow Wai," but this is the result of my folly!' We spoke about the wounds on his body, and he told us that he had run away and been recaptured by patrols, and then severely beaten on being brought back to the camp.

Some of the unfortunate men though supplied with adequate passports had been held up, waiting day after day hoping to hear that they might proceed on their journey. No telegram had ever come, nor had they any means of ascertaining whether the permission they hoped for had even been requested. The horrors of this Inferno were more strongly impressed on us each day. From early dawn till dark the men gambled, loafed, fought and cursed their fate. Young boys were thrown into the company of men to whom no form of vice was unknown, and a spirit of blank hopelessness dominated the place.

On the second night of our stay[1] heavy rain began to fall, and continued through the next day. It poured into our room by a dozen holes in the roof, and the

[1] [At Hsinghsinghsia -- Analyst]